

**Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C. 20554**

In the Matter of)	
)	
Amendment of the Commission's Rules)	WT Docket No. 10-177
Concerning Commercial Radio Operators)	

NOTICE OF PROPOSED RULEMAKING

**Comments of Master Publishing, Inc. in regard to
Section-B: COLEM Issues.**

To the Commisison:

Master Publishing, Inc., is the publisher of ***GROL + RADAR***, which has become the standard study guide for the FCC Commercial Question Pools for Elements 1 (MROP), 3 (GROL), and 8 (RADAR Endorsement). This book, and its predecessor ***GROL Plus***, have been used by training schools and students since the inception of the COLEM system in 1993. Master Publishing's editor, Peter Trotter, KB9SMG, and the author of ***GROL + RADAR***, Gordon West, WB6NOA, led the effort to complete the most recent update of the Elements 1, 3, and 8 question pools, which was completed in 2009. Element 9 is currently being reviewed and updated by members of The GMDSS Task Force.

In general, we support the FCC's proposal to assign responsibility for maintaining and updating the commercial licensing question pools to an outside organization. However, we believe that FCC needs to recognize the unique nature of the various pools, as well as the nature and capability of the COLEM organizations in assigning responsibility for specific question pools.

Background and Discussion:

At The GMDSS Task Force meeting held in Seattle, WA, September 28, 2010, Ghassan Khalek , Senior Electronics Engineer, Mobility Division, FCC Wireless Telecommunications Bureau, described the current FCC process for updating the commercial question pools. He said that the FCC can no longer wait a long time between pool updates. He stated that the FCC has the ability to change the question pools whenever it is determined necessary to correct a flaw or error that is identified in a question pool. He further stated that applicants should be given exam credit if they pass an exam with flawed questions in it, even if the FCC may have already corrected the flaw. When asked how the public would be informed of any and all changes, he recommended that everyone just monitor the FCC website postings on a regular basis. Apparently this would mean that Public Notice with errata to reflect the actual changes would be issued by the FCC to the COLEMs or the general public to advise when changes had been made. This type of uncertainty would, in our opinion, create nothing but chaos in the publishing of study materials in the marketplace, for the instructors teaching applicants, for students studying for their examinations, and for the COLEMs when administering exams.

Such an approach raises a host of questions:

1. Which question pool is valid for a COLEM to use when giving an examination?
2. Which question pool is valid for study by the applicant?
3. Which pool is the most current one for instructors to use in teaching their classes?

4. How should publishers update their materials to keep up with random changes made without regard to a schedule?

Under this approach, it is possible to have students studying 3 different question pools, not knowing which one will be used for their examination.

This is a disastrous approach to maintaining the question pools for all concerned – COLEMs, instructors, students, publishers, the FCC, and the public. Therefore a question pool revision cycle and schedule must be adopted, with formal postings into public domain of the official FCC pools and effective pool dates to preclude constant question revisions.

The NPRM references the FCC Volunteer Examiner Coordinator program, and the ability of the VECs to maintain the Amateur Radio question pools. Indeed, this is an excellent model for the COLEMs to follow, should the FCC's proposals be adopted.

The not-for-profit VECs established the National Council of Volunteer Examiner Coordinators (NCVEC), an organization of all 14 VECs that provides a formal structure for interfacing with the FCC and for maintaining the 3 Amateur Radio question pools. The NCVEC elects a Question Pool Committee (QPC) from its membership, and that group of volunteers are dedicated, highly-experienced Amateur Extra Class licensed operators who review and update the Amateur Radio pools on a regular schedule. Each pool is reviewed and updated once every 4 years. Outside expertise is provided to the QPC, and those who serve on the committee understand the importance and purpose of the question pools and the subelement topics contained therein (FCC Rules; Electrical Principles; Operating Practices; Safety, etc). The NCVEC was formed shortly after the FCC privatized the examination process in 1986, and the QPC system was implemented at the time the FCC formally turned over maintenance of the Amateur Radio question pools to the VECs.

No such organization exists within the COLEM system. The 9 COLEMs operate independently of one another as private, for-profit businesses. The COLEMs are primarily test administration organizations. Unlike the NCVEC/QPC membership, most of the personnel and staff of the COLEMs are not Commercial Radio Operator License holders. As such, they do not have the in-house staff expertise, nor the single-minded focus to maintain the commercial pools in the same way that the NCVEC does its work. While the FCC may have "hoped" that the COLEMs would develop in the same way as the NCVEC, the ground work for that was never mandated by rule nor did it occur naturally. Now, the FCC proposes to mandate through Rule Making this same type of Question Pool Committee structure without any provision for funding the cost to develop and maintain this program.

We understand that the work of the GMDSS Task Force is funded by the U.S. Coast Guard. The FCC should investigate how that is done, and consider funding the proposed COLEM question pool organization.

Proposal:

We believe that the FCC should move forward with the proposed rules to make the COLEMs responsible for maintenance of the commercial question pools, and in addition we recommend the following:

1. The pools must be maintained on a regular schedule. Because it has worked extremely well with the NCVEC/Program, we suggest a 4-year cycle for Elements 1, 3, 8 and 9. The

previous revisions of Elements 1, 3 and 8 were completed in 2009. Thus, the next revision would be completed in 2013.

2. Old pools should be terminated on a fixed date, and new pools implemented on a fixed date. We suggest termination on June 30, with an effective date for mandatory use of the new pools on July 1. The old pools must be used for examinations until the termination date. New pools cannot be used for examinations until their effective date. These dates coincide with a standard educational school calendar.
3. The organization responsible for maintaining the pools should be required to release new and revised pools into public domain not later than December 1st of the preceding year (i.e.: the new pools taking effect July 1, 2013, should be completed and posted not later than December 1, 2012). This schedule allows educators and publishers the time necessary to develop revised study materials for release to students so that they in turn have adequate time to study for the new examinations.
4. New, revised, or corrected questions can only be added to a pool at the time a new pool is to take effect. Questions that are found to be incorrect or faulty can be removed from the current pool and not used by COLEMs on examinations. This is consistent with the approach used by the NCVEC with the Amateur Radio pools.
5. Not all pools should be under the aegis of the COLEMs. We recommend that the 2 GMDSS Operator License examination question pools (7 and 7-R) be assigned to The National GMDSS Modernization Task Force. The GMDSS Task Force has developed a unique team of experts who continuously review and update these two question pools, and this approach should be maintained and recognized in the FCC's rules. This body is composed of members from the RTCM, the U.S. Coast Guard, the FCC, and other organizations. For all intents and purposes, responsibility for the licensing of GMDSS Operators has been taken over by the U.S. Coast Guard, which requires applicants to complete an 80-hour, USCG-approved STCW course in order to serve aboard a vessel as the GMDSS Operator. The FCC has granted equivalency to the Coast Guard STCW courses and examinations for its Elements 7 and 7-R exams. Transferring responsibility for these two pools to the COLEMs is an invitation to disaster.
6. We agree with the FCC proposal to consolidate the 3 Radiotelegraph licenses into one license. As noted in the NPRM, only a handful of these licenses are issued each year. The two question pools associated with these licenses (Elements 5 and 6) are very obsolete. If maintained, the pools would need complete revision. We support the comments of Owen Anderson of the GMDSS Task Force that the licenses be consolidated; that the Elements 5 and 6 Question Pools be retired; and that the examination for the new Radiotelegraph Operator's License consist of written Elements 1 and 3, and a Morse code test.
7. We propose that the question pools assigned for COLEM responsibility therefore be Elements 1 (MROP), 3 (GROL), 8 (RADAR Endorsement), and 9 (GMDSS Maintainer).

Respectfully Submitted:

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